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**WRITERS AND INTELLECTUALS ON BRITAIN AND EUROPE,  
1918–2018**

# Gibraltarian Hauntologies: Spectres of Colonialism in the Fiction of M. G. Sanchez

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This essay discusses two novels by Gibraltarian writer M. G. Sanchez, *Jonathan Gallardo* (2015) and *Solitude House* (2015). In both novels, the protagonists are haunted by ghosts from the past, emerging from otherworlds, or parallel worlds, whose boundaries have become permeable. I argue that Sanchez's literary otherworlds offer an incisive critique of border consciousness and residual colonialism in Gibraltar. In terms of genre, Sanchez's writing oscillates between the postcolonial gothic and magical realism. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's concept of 'hauntology', I argue that Gibraltar itself emerges as a spectre of colonialism, reminding both Britain and Europe of their history of colonial exploitation that comes back to haunt them in the shape of the victims of global carbon capitalism.

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## 1. British-European Entanglements

As debates around Brexit suggest, the British are at least partly in denial about the extent and the strength of their ties with Continental Europe. One reason for the success of the 'Leave Campaign' before the referendum in June 2016 was that campaigners such as UKIP leader Nigel Farage mobilized powerful narratives and myths pertaining to the discourse of British exceptionalism and Euroscepticism (Spiering 2015; Habermann 2020). The most prominent among these myths is that of Britain's 'island story', which casts British aloofness as a geographical fact – the English Channel, cutting off Britain from mainland Europe, with the White Cliffs of Dover serving as a bulwark against invasion (Christinidis 2015). Yet, to this day, the Crown holds the Channel Islands, geographically much closer to France (see Kamm and Sedlmayr 2008; Habermann 2018a) while Gibraltar, on the southern tip of the Iberian peninsula, is a British Overseas Territory, captured by an Anglo-Dutch force in 1704, and ceded to Britain 'in perpetuity' in the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. In terms of the 'island story' myth, Gibraltar is off the map; it is such an anomaly that when the British government triggered Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, it forgot to make any provisions for 'the Rock', which promptly became a bone of contention (Boffey 2017; Boffey and Rankin 2018), if only briefly, before other concerns drowned out Gibraltarian voices again.

In this essay, I will attend to (British) Gibraltar as a hybrid place that epitomizes Britain's entanglement with Continental Europe and is thus deeply affected by Brexit. Focussing on recent fiction, I will discuss the work of novelist M. G. Sanchez, whose texts offer the most perspicacious literary exploration of the Gibraltarian predicament. Adding his most recent novels, *Jonathan Gallardo* (2015) and *Solitude House* (2015) to the growing BrexLit canon, I argue that Sanchez's literary otherworlds, copiously populated by ghosts, offer an incisive critique of border consciousness and residual colonialism in Gibraltar. The more members of the Gibraltarian establishment seek to deny the colonial legacy of domination, exploitation and violence, the more it will come back to haunt the community. Finally, Gibraltar itself emerges as a spectre of colonialism, reminding Europe of its history of colonial exploitation that is returning to haunt the continent in the shape of the victims of globalisation.

## 2. Attending to Gibraltar

Gibraltar is definitely a geopolitical ‘hotspot’, situated at the mouth of the Strait of Gibraltar which links the Mediterranean with the Atlantic and divides, as well as connects, the continents of Europe and Africa. Gibraltar is a peninsula with great natural defensive advantages whose strategic importance historically lay in the fact that it is possible from there to control entrance into the Mediterranean Sea. Even though this strategic importance is much diminished today, Gibraltar is still Britain’s ‘gateway to the Mediterranean’.<sup>1</sup> Both in 1967 and in 2002, the Gibraltarian people voted to remain part of the United Kingdom. Seeking to punish the loyalty of Gibraltarians to Britain in the 1960s, the Spanish dictator Franco closed the border in 1969, cutting off all connections and creating a siege-like situation that isolated ‘the Rock’. The border was partially re-opened in 1982, and fully in 1985 as part of the European integration process. In the 1990s, the British Labour government’s support of the process of devolution and self-determination led to a reform of the Gibraltarian constitution which took effect in 2007.

Though Britain maintains control over Gibraltar, Spain is still interested in the strategically placed city located at the Southern tip of its nation, regarding it as disputed territory. The Gibraltar issue thus continues to rankle between Spain and Britain: the conflict has unsurprisingly flared up again after the Brexit referendum (Sánchez 2019; Boffey 2019), and Spanish claims to Gibraltar have been renewed after Brexit.<sup>2</sup> In terms of population and language, Gibraltar is a truly hybrid place. In addition to English and Spanish, a local vernacular is spoken, *llanito*, which is a mixture of Andalusian Spanish and English. The economy revolves around tourism, online gambling and financial services. Faced with Spanish hostility and forced into the binary logic of nation states, the Gibraltarian population identifies overwhelmingly with Britain, although in mainland Britain, in general, people are

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<sup>1</sup> For the history and geopolitical importance of Gibraltar see Abulafia 2011, Aldrich and Connell 1998, Archer 2006, and Holland 2012.

<sup>2</sup> In view of the increasing politically motivated obstructions at the border between Gibraltar and Spain, a ‘Gibraltar Frontier Queue Live Stream’ was put online; see <https://www.frontierqueue.gi/>, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

at best mildly interested in Gibraltar. Given its history and geographical location, however, the Gibraltarian loyalty to Europe is also strong, since the cultural concept of Europe and the political commitment to EU integration are designed to ease the tensions between contending nation states. In the racist language of ethnic and national purity, according to a binary, exclusionary logic that disregards three hundred years of cultural mingling and exchange, Gibraltar becomes an anomaly and a paradox. Once cultural hybridity is embraced, however, acknowledging the existence, and the rights of a culture and society which have evolved over such a long time, there is a place for Gibraltar, preferably as part of a united Europe. It is still an open question as to what will happen as Britain is disentangling itself from the union, effectively turning the border between Spain and Gibraltar into an external border of the EU.

### 3. M. G. Sanchez: A British-Gibraltarian Writer

M. G. Sanchez, now living in the UK, is the most prolific and outspoken Gibraltarian writer, passionate about telling the stories of 'the Rock'. Sanchez's non-fiction includes forays into Gibraltarian history, such as the volume *The Prostitutes of Serruya's Lane and Other Hidden Stories* (2007) which discusses little-known aspects of Gibraltar's Victorian history, and the anthology *Georgian and Victorian Gibraltar: Incredible Eyewitness Accounts* (2012). Another volume, *Gibraltar: An Anthology of Literary Texts, 1720–1890* (2006), collects the – often unfavourable – impressions of British travellers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William M. Thackeray or Benjamin Disraeli about Gibraltar, views that have contributed to Gibraltar's historical reputation as a dangerous, insanitary and disreputable Southern Mediterranean outpost of the British Empire. Such historical work is complemented by fiction: three novels to date, stories about Gibraltarian life (*Rock Black: Ten Gibraltarian Stories* (2006), *Diary of a Victorian Colonial and Other Tales* (2008), and most recently *Crossed Lines* (2019), which takes a more global perspective), and autobiographical writings including *Past: A Memoir* (2016).<sup>3</sup> For his rich evocations of Gibraltar's history, Sanchez taps

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<sup>3</sup> For reviews of Sanchez's work see Adami 2015 and Stotesbury 2014.

into his own childhood memories and recollections of the time when he became acutely aware of the palimpsestic quality of his environment, noting:

It was as if my mind had suddenly become a projection screen uniting two different pasts, my own and that of the district around me, the two of them fused together like a pair of overlaid plastic transparencies, making me more aware than ever of the stratified yet strangely interwoven nature of Gibraltarian socio-colonial history (Sanchez 2016: 195).

Sanchez's work is highly political in that he insists on exploring Gibraltar's past as colonial history, and the colonial mind-set still residual in Gibraltar – an insistence not always appreciated at home. For example, following the publication of his *Diary of a Victorian Colonial and Other Tales*, there was a brief skirmish in the *Gibraltar Chronicle* in 2010 when the designated mayor of Gibraltar, Anthony Lombard, expressed his opinion in a Letter to the Editor that Sanchez had done his native city a disservice by dwelling on the conditions of nineteenth-century Gibraltar, which he considered 'negative and unedifying' (Lombard 2010). For the longest time, the Gibraltarian mind-set was defined in terms of a 'siege mentality', which has now supposedly been overcome. People are keen to move on and present Gibraltar as a modern, confident, economically viable and culturally vibrant place. Characteristically, in an article in the *New Statesman* on 24 March 2014, the Gibraltar-born journalist Helen Wade stated: 'Regardless of the centuries-old wrangling over sovereignty with Spain, Gibraltar is now more than ever the Rock of the Gibraltarians. [...] This nationalism, underpinned by a new constitution in 2007, has gained a momentum all of its own, free from the mental shackles of colonialism.' In contrast, Sanchez's work suggests that if those mental shackles have really been removed – and it is not clear that they have – we still need to attend to the traces, perhaps the scars, that remain.

Sanchez's most extended fictional explorations of the colonial mindset in Gibraltar can be found in three novels published in 2013 and 2015, set in the pivotal period of the 1970s and early 1980s, during the closure and shortly after the opening of the border. As has often been pointed out in the context of Anglophone

postcolonial studies, psychologically, part of the problem that colonial subjects face is the aspiration to be like the British, and often specifically to pass as 'English', which subjects them to a process of colonial mimicry that produces the condition of the 'almost but not quite'. In his seminal essay about colonial mimicry, Homi Bhabha argues that English colonialism 'speaks in a tongue that is forked' (Bhabha 1984: 126). Due to the tension between colonialism's humanist civilizing mission and its intrinsic racism, 'the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*' (*ibid.*, emphasis in original), so that 'mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal' (*ibid.*) – 'almost the same, *but not quite*' (*ibid.*: 127, emphasis in original). Due to its economy of partial representation, colonial mimicry is both farcical and menacing. 'The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry* – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace* – a difference that is almost total but not quite' (*ibid.*: 132, emphasis in original), producing 'the twin figures of narcissism and paranoia that repeat furiously, uncontrollably' (*ibid.*: 132).

In Sanchez's novels, this split emerges as deeply uncanny, as the colonial predicament translates into a corrosive duplicity that warps the emotional life of all protagonists. Moreover, in the Gibraltarian context, the psychological split of the colonial subject has a material correlative in the border, which becomes a symbol and tangible manifestation of the split colonial psyche just as much as it is a material and political reality and a daily logistic nuisance. Border consciousness and border-mindedness permeated Gibraltarian existence especially during the period of closure and are at present threatening to do so again. The closed border forced Gibraltar to turn in on itself, producing a claustrophobic community in a place that had been a cultural crossroads, situated in a prime geostrategic location. Due to this compression, it feels as if there is too much history crammed into a small space. As I suggested in an essay on *The Escape Artist* (2013), Sanchez's novels can usefully be analysed in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the *chronotope*: they evoke a special spatio-temporal set-up with the border as a wall that circumscribes a community stewing in its own juice. Divisions proliferate as relationships become warped and claustrophobic (Habermann 2018b). In the following analysis of Sanchez's most

recent novels, unlike *The Escape Artist* set only in Gibraltar, I want to take this further, showing how these novels negotiate Gibraltar's colonial history through a deployment of literary otherworlds.

#### 4. Gibraltarian Otherworlds

Like *The Escape Artist*, Sanchez's two exclusively Gibraltarian novels, both published in 2015, address the problem of residual colonialism. *Jonathan Gallardo* and *Solitude House* are complementary in that they focus on two protagonists – the eponymous Jonathan Gallardo and John Seracino in *Solitude House* – who start from opposite ends of the Gibraltarian social spectrum, only to be exposed to similarly gruesome threats from ghostly parallel worlds, and to an experience of paralysis apparently inevitable in a not quite post-colonial Gibraltar.

Jonathan Gallardo is an uneducated orphan who goes on to work as a bin man for the Gibraltar Public Works Department. Living in a damp old flat on an appalling diet, he is quite lonely, although at one point he embarks on an abortive relationship with a British woman who works for the Navy. By contrast, John Seracino, the protagonist of *Solitude House*, is a doctor with relatively high social status and a good job at the Medical Centre. Hailing from Malta, he moved to Gibraltar, as he relates, in order to live in a place still proud to be under British rule. Significantly, in both novels, Gibraltarian schizophrenia is played out through the existence of otherworlds, or parallel worlds, which come to affect the protagonists' lives. In Jonathan's case, the otherworldly experience unfolds as he begins to hear voices. Though uneducated, he is sensitive, empathetic and alive to the history of the place to such an extent that he can 'tune in', as it were, to pick up the echoes of suffering in bygone times. Despite fears that he may be going mad, he gets used to the voices and embarks on an enlightening study of Gibraltarian history, discovering that the crimes to which he becomes privy actually did take place in the very spots where the voices reside. What finally drives him over the edge, however, is the fact that he begins to have tragic premonitions of the future. This becomes possible as a thought experiment by treating time as an otherworld, a kind of parallel space, thus both conceiving of the past as an intrinsic and potentially accessible part of the present



and opening up worlds of the future. For example, Jonathan hears an explosion that actually takes place days later, killing somebody. Chatting to his colleague, to his horror he suddenly sees him die of pancreatic cancer, '*El Amargau dying in a room with diamond-shaped floor tiles and a garishly coloured picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus hanging on the wall above his bed...*' (Sanchez 2015a: 235–6, italics in original). As such incidents multiply, Jonathan unravels mentally. Dropping out of his social network, on a drunken night he is victimised by a pair of criminal German fascists. The '*Deutsche Bonnie and Clyde*' (*ibid*: 311) rob him and leave him gagged and tied to his bed, saved in the nick of time by his uncle, an alcoholic who turns out to share Jonathan's clairvoyance. This gift runs in the family, and making use of it might allow the Gallardos to change the future if anybody cared to listen to them.

In *Solitude House*, John Seracino retires early with a golden handshake from his job at the Medical Centre after a life of outward respectability and secret debauchery. Indulging in casual sex whenever he can, he is a confirmed misanthrope who uses his wealth to buy an isolated house on the edge of a cliff, which he carefully decorates and fills with his collections. Just as he is settling into his perfect home, however, it becomes unhomey, uncanny, as the ghosts of the past catch up with him. This is possible because the grounds of Solitude House contain a former shrine of Our Lady of Europa, where a number of weird Thelemites of the early twentieth century, inspired by the infamous occultist Aleister Crowley, had managed to open a door to the underworld. From there, the ghosts of former patients now emerge to take revenge on Seracino for his professional negligence. As they are slowly approaching the bedroom where he has barricaded himself, he is writing down his story – the non-repentant confessional of a warped and duplicitous member of the Gibraltarian colonial establishment.

Thus, in both *Jonathan Gallardo* and *Solitude House*, the story turns on the existence of otherworlds, which effect an imaginative deployment of border consciousness. Both Jonathan's and Dr Seracino's lives have been crucially shaped by the border: as an adolescent, a bored Jonathan spends Sunday afternoons at the border,

watching families that were divided back in 1969 communicate across the empty hundred-metre stretch separating them. In hoarse and emotional voices, often trying to make themselves heard above the shrieking westerly wind, the families exchange news in Spanish about betrothals and illnesses, job interviews and sudden deaths, marital break-ups and school exams[.] (Sanchez 2015a: 42)

Jonathan 'privately wonders what it must be like to have somebody who cares for you stuck on the other side, so close and yet so far away, so perfectly visible and yet so detached' (*ibid.*: 43). In John Seracino's case, when the border is partially opened in 1982, he crosses into Spain for his sexual adventures, taking advantage of his economic superiority but constantly aggravated by the inconveniences and difficulties of crossing. Even toying at some point with the idea of settling in Spain, he dismisses this due to the volatile border situation. Seracino's old colleague Dr Magilton-Garcia tries to dissuade him in strong terms from buying property in Spain:

Spain, my dear boy, is a crocodile and Gibraltar is the little oxpecker that sits on the crocodile's nose. The crocodile is now saying to the oxpecker, 'Don't worry, little birdie. I have made a promise to the European Community that from now on I am going to be an animal-loving vegetarian who doesn't mind little birdies sitting on his nose.' But a crocodile will always be a crocodile and the oxpecker will always be a tasty little morsel sitting temptingly on a reptile's nose, *sabes lo que le digo, señor mío?* (Sanchez 2015b: 65)

Due to the notoriously difficult border situation, Seracino also has to treat patients suffering from amaxophobia, the fear of being confined in a stationary vehicle, and 'incapable of talking about anything except the border and the impact that having to cross it twice a day was having on their lives' (*ibid.*: 113). The border thus looms large in the mind of every Gibraltarian.

In the novels' otherworldly scenarios, the past is present as a parallel space, held at bay by some sort of boundary. Crucially, however, in both novels, efforts to

compartmentalise and divide ultimately come to grief. In Gallardo's case, the worlds of the past and the future, simultaneously extant in other dimensions, increasingly press in on the present moment. Seeking to understand his predicament, Gallardo begins to research theories about space-time and a multi-dimensional universe by such early twentieth-century authors as J. W. Dunne. Inclined to dismiss them as 'half-baked shit' (Sanchez 2015a: 207), he finds the rational explanation, that he must be going mad, equally unpalatable.

[W]hat filters through to him are the aural residues of long-forgotten crimes, the sonic remains of far-off yet still reverberating historical traumas: stabbings, lynchings, beatings, kidnappings, crimes of passion, unreported rapes, the callous abandonment of new-born infants. The perpetrators, he realises, tend to be the same set of people: coalmen, carters, soldiers, porters, boatmen, drunken marines, sacked policemen. As are the victims, who nine times out of ten are either women or children or defenceless cripples. [...] From tenebrous sunless doorways and rain-flooded patios [...] to the rusting chicken wire of the frontier fence – in all these places he can hear a veritable army of otherworldly native voices, bawling, blubbing, howling, endlessly moaning about the depredations of their British overlords, shrilly and silently decrying the injustices heaped upon them. (*ibid.*: 142; 144)

As the echoes become more audible, it is noticeable that the otherworld mostly conserves violent acts committed within a colonial framework. Hearing on television about Guy Debord's situationist view that '*bricks and mortar carry the echo of history inscribed upon them, that it is possible to dialogue with the past just by opening ourselves up to the geographical spaces around us*' (*ibid.*: 119, italics in original), Jonathan actually finds traces of the incidents he has become privy to in old copies of the *Gibraltar Chronicle*. While the existence of the otherworld, the parallel presence of the colonial past, is definitely uncanny, true horror is created by the collapse of the temporal boundaries: when Jonathan begins to have his premonitory visions of the future, he realises that just as the past has shaped, and continues to shape the present, future disasters are already emerging under his very eyes, making him

feel responsible, if powerless. Refusing to be compartmentalised in a parallel space, relegated to the past, colonial violence bleeds into the present and determines the future.

This spatio-temporal conundrum is captured stylistically by the third person narrative in the present tense, focalised through Jonathan, which in fact constitutes an 'impossible' perspective: past events are told in the novel as if they are just unfolding in the present, confusing the normal trajectory of a life story and thus also undermining the possibility of progress as typically dramatized in the *bildungsroman*. The novel finishes with a brief 'Epilogue' that changes perspective abruptly as Jonathan himself relates the aftermath of his brush with the fascists in the first person, now in the past tense: '*But I didn't die. Or maybe I did...*' (ibid.: 316, italics in original) Having experienced the presentism, the constant actualisation of latent violence, Jonathan becomes grounded in his own tale: once he has been quite literally shackled to his bed, he can finally tell his story in his own voice. Recovering from his near-death experience, he relates how he joined his misfit uncle at the Line Wall Road battlements:

*So I went to the nearest booze shop and bought a bottle of whisky which I drank with him in silence while gazing at the sun slowly sinking behind the hills of Tarifa and Algeciras. And that was the beginning of the end, or maybe the end of the beginning, I don't really know, it all depends on how you look at it, you know what I'm saying?* (ibid.: 318, italics in original)

Significantly, Jonathan's chiasmic notion of time does not allow for a *new* beginning: as long as Gibraltarians do not change their course, acknowledging their history of colonial violence, it seems there can only be an end, the end of the beginning, or the beginning of the end – an end that Sanchez takes care to mark as distinctly Gibraltarian with Jonathan's final *llanito* phrase 'you know what I'm saying?' Left hanging in the air, it carries strong echoes of the Spanish '*sabes lo que te digo*'.

Similarly, for Seracino in *Solitude House*, who had raged against the border for so many years, the opening of the door to the otherworld of the past, or rather the view of the 'perpetually unfolding magical bridge' (259), spells disaster. Seracino,

supremely negligent member of the medical establishment, gets his comeuppance as ghostly hands of past victims reach for him. Again, the narrative perspective seems impossible, since it transpires at the end that Seracino is supposed to have written his lengthy, poised and detailed account under severe time pressure and in acute distress and fear of his life. This intensely weird situation is marked as distinctly Gibraltarian, too, as the last words Seracino hears are those of a ghost speaking *llanito*: '¿Can you gih'me something for my *hemorroides*, doctor, plis, *que* they're all swollen *y pican que no vea?*' (274) Sanchez thus presents variations of a serious conundrum: while the border stunts the growth and ruins the health of his Gibraltarian characters, the collapse of borders is imagined as equally, and profoundly threatening. And as Sanchez's fictions show, there is a logic to this, since there would be no Gibraltar as we know it without the border, while the border was, and remains, a colonial feature, tying Gibraltar forever to its colonial heritage.

## 5. Postcolonial Gothic, Magical Realism and the New Weird

As shown above, Sanchez's focus on otherworlds ideally reflects the Gibraltarian predicament. It remains now to situate his practice in a spectrum of genres and modes of writing that deal with the colonial legacy and related problems of social injustice. The strong emphasis on ghosts and the supernatural relates Sanchez's work to the postcolonial gothic with its wide spectrum of ghost stories dealing with alienation, dispossession and occult forms of spirituality such as voodoo, especially in view of Bhabha's reflections about the uncanny aspects of colonial mimicry.<sup>4</sup> However, the ghosts, fantastic events and otherworldly scenarios prominently deployed in the novels also link Sanchez's work with magical realism, which raises the question of the relationship between postcolonial gothic and magical realism. In her essay 'The Gothic and Magical Realism', Lucie Armitt, commenting on the great and enduring popularity of the gothic, proposes to discuss it 'alongside its more overtly politicized

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<sup>4</sup> Among the large corpus of work on Gothic literature, for works relevant to Sanchez's fiction see Bacon (ed.) 2018, Gelder 2014, Heise-von der Lippe 2013, Hogle (ed.) 2014, Hogle and Miles 2019, Khair 2013, Khair et al. (eds.) 2019, and Renk 2012.

sister form, magical realism' in order to 'consider to what extent the terrain that lies on the blurry boundary between these two modes of writing shifts in response to a larger political impetus that rejects the world of confidences and its political tricksters' (Armitt 2014: 224). In magical realism, Armitt states, the boundaries between mimesis and anti-mimesis are more fluent than in the gothic:

Unlike the conventional ghost story, the result in literary terms is neither to eradicate the realism established beforehand in the text nor to dilute the unsettling effect of the ghost. Instead, by granting equal narrative presence to both, magical realism reveals that the extraordinary exists most absolutely within the quotidian real. Here, the specter usually bears a message or embodies political significance, for, in the cultures most closely associated with magical realism, politics is more frequently associated with the extraordinary than the ordinary. (*ibid.*: 224–5)

While magical realism is a global phenomenon, often particularly associated with Latin America, it remains marginal in English literature, contrary to the Gothic, which has been prominent in English literature for centuries. Both are associated with the foreign; however, '[w]here magical realism embraces the foreign, whether spiritual or extra-territorial, the Gothic tries to keep the stranger at bay but fails' (*ibid.*: 225), as Armitt states. In M. G. Sanchez's novels, both in *Jonathan Gallardo* and *Solitude House*, there is no suggestion that the characters are hallucinating when they experience spectral presences from the otherworld; these parallel worlds are real on the level of the story world. It seems, however, that if the gothic and magical realism are conceived in terms of two different but related modes of writing, Sanchez's work oscillates between them, perhaps in acknowledgement of his hybrid position between English and Iberian/Latin American stylistic traditions. *Solitude House*, I would argue, is closer to Gothic horror in line with its protagonist's status as an imperialist and perpetrator, while Jonathan Gallardo 'embraces the foreign' at least initially, opening himself up to the otherness of an extended notion of reality. This allows for a magical realist 'form of storytelling that maximizes the political

responsibility of story to connect with the everyday world, while revelling in the simultaneous presence of the extraordinary within that actuality.' (*ibid.*: 233)

Despite their differences, however, both novels fulfil an indispensable requirement of magical *realism*, which is the strong presence of the phenomenal world in the narrative (Faris 2004: 14). This presence serves to distinguish it from fantasy or allegory. Sanchez's descriptions of Jonathan's wanderings through Gibraltar are meticulously observant to time and place; both novels abound in geographical markers, names of streets, estates and bars as well as descriptions of architectural features, people, the colourful bustle on Gibraltarian streets, objects, sounds, smells, and the weather. Characteristically, moreover, Sanchez combines the high precision and minute detail of his descriptions with a humour that ranges from the mildly ironic to the biting satirical. The fabric of life in Gibraltar is thus intricately evoked through the protagonists' experiences as they try to come to terms with occurrences they can only interpret as supernatural: condescending doctors who decree that Jonathan must have his ears syringed if he insists on hearing voices, his appointments at the mental hospital named after King George V, and his intriguing visit to 'Mama Maria', the 'best tarot card reader and *spiritista* on the Rock' (Sanchez 2015a, italics in original), arranged for him by his colleague Pepe. In *Solitude House*, Dr Seracino finds himself paying a visit to the Bishop of Gibraltar to ask for a ritual exorcism of his isolated house to get rid of the faces he keeps seeing. After a bizarre conversation, the Bishop actually comes along to Solitude House to read a prayer in the old shrine on the premises. Here, as throughout Sanchez's fiction, Gibraltar's Catholicism, which forges a cultural link to Spain rather than Britain, allows for a highly flexible attitude to the supernatural and an easier assimilation of the wonderful. Drawing attention to the conspicuous Latinate elements of Gibraltarian culture, Sanchez highlights its hybridity and, employing the potential of magical realism to register political complexity, asks for a more inclusive acceptance of cultural difference even as he points to the problems and hypocrisies in Gibraltarian society.

Finally, in view of its preoccupation with otherworlds, Sanchez's work can be linked to the more recent genre of the New Weird (Roberts 2013; VanderMeer 2008; Venezia 2015), represented by such authors as China Miéville, who also addresses

the urge to uphold borders, even against the odds, in the globalised world of the early twenty-first century. In his novel *The City and the City* (2009), Miéville tells the story of two different cities, Beszel and Ul Qoma, occupying the same physical space, with the inhabitants forced, on pain of extinction, to 'unsee' the other city. If they acknowledge the fact that they can actually see features of the other city, they commit 'Breach', which is immediately punished by some mysterious authority. This order is then significantly disrupted by refugees unfamiliar with the rules. The clash between the existence and the need for boundaries and the utopian impulse to remove them is fictionally explored in terms of otherworlds – parallel worlds which magnify divisions into an ontological split, resorting to imaginary world-building to highlight the political implications of border mindedness (Wolf 2013). Beyond Sanchez's contribution to the postcolonial gothic and magical realism, Sanchez's fiction also forms part of this more openly political debate; his threatening evocations of the collapse of boundaries acknowledge the aporia of Gibraltar, which only exists by virtue of a border that divides the territory from an economically less affluent Spanish hinterland. This begs the question, especially in a Brexit context, what a genuinely post-colonial Gibraltar would look like. Among the ironies of Brexit may be the (re)incorporation of Gibraltar into Spain and the reunification of Ireland.

Sanchez's most recent collection of stories, suggestively entitled *Crossed Lines* (2019a), acknowledges this paradox through a confessional account by a Spaniard called Francisco Colomán Trujillo, one of the many Spanish workers who negotiate the border twice every day, on their way to work in Gibraltar and back into Spain. Despised and exploited by Gibraltarians, Trujillo is drawn into the colonial duplicity: overtly expressing allegiance and solidarity with Gibraltar, where he earns his living, he clandestinely hates the place and its people so passionately that he spreads anti-Gibraltarian propaganda through Twitter and cannot wait to see the day when the Spanish flag will fly in Gibraltar. Subjected to British dominance as an Overseas Territory, in its relations to Spain, Gibraltar amplifies its identity as an outpost of Britain. In John Seracino's words: 'The average Gibbo may be as English as an unshaven Real Madrid central defender, but he does carry an image of Queen Elizabeth II engraved on his heart. Cut the blighter open and you'll find this glorious



portrait miniature stencilled on to his furiously beating Latin ticker.' (Sanchez 2015b: 88) In Sanchez's story, Gibraltarians are thus shown to rely haughtily in their everyday lives on those who would seek to undermine Gibraltar's territorial integrity, loyally looking to Britain for a help that may not come.

This continual preoccupation with borders and borderlands also features in Sanchez's recent non-fiction. Reflecting on the cultural and psychological impact of the border, he turns to Gloria Anzaldúa's influential book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). As Anzaldúa states, the 'U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture.' (Anzaldúa 1987: 3) Anzaldúa makes a poetically evocative case for a 'New Mestiza' culture, confidently using the hybrid language of the Borderlands. Reflecting on Gibraltar and its typical forms of (economic) interaction in the Borderlands, Sanchez takes his cue from Anzaldúa to argue that her vision of the border between the US and Mexico could be adapted to 'apply to the elderly matutera, varizha, tissue-sellers and other luckless chancers associated with our own frontier, a human grotesquerie that congregates mainly on the Spanish flank of la frontera, but sometimes spills over onto the Gibraltarian side, continually reminding us of the unnaturalness of all dividing lines' (Sanchez 2019b: 25–6). Finally, the question remains as to why Sanchez's fictional Gibraltar is so richly populated by ghosts, consistently associating the territory and the border problem with spectrality.

## 6. Gibraltarian Hauntologies

In search of an explanation, I take my cue from Bhabha's notion of colonial mimicry as discussed above. As Bhabha explains, mimicry 'creates an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" presence' (Bhabha 1984: 127). It is hence always a double articulation, a double vision that threatens any subject's sense of unity, essence and wholeness. The colonial house is always haunted. It is therefore instructive to read Sanchez's work in the light of Jacques Derrida's concept of 'hauntology' – a concept he developed in response to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Reflecting on Karl Marx's idea of communism

as a spectre that haunts Europe, Derrida in his turn explores the spectres of Marx that haunt the world after the ostensible victory of capitalism supposed to bring about the 'end of history'. In *Specters of Marx* (2006), Derrida is inspired by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, evoking the ghost of old Hamlet who persistently returns to expose past crimes and injustices, and to urge his son to take retributive action. The spectre is conceptualised as the embodiment of a spirit that is not honoured. Accordingly, Derrida describes hauntology as a 'logic of haunting [that] would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being[.] [...] It would harbour within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves' (Derrida 2006: 381). After the 'end of history', as Derrida states, 'the spirit comes by *coming back* [revenant, note of transl.], it figures *both* a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again' (Derrida 2006: 381/391; emphases in original). Hauntology thus meddles with time's arrow, persistently pointing to past injustices and unresolved problems that refuse to stay relegated to the past.

History teaches, *pace* US president Donald Trump, that no wall endures indefinitely, and all boundaries, including those of the psyche, are somehow permeable, incapable of effectively shutting in, or shutting out the rejected and unacknowledged, the colonized and exploited. As Katy Shaw summarizes in her book *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature*, hauntology is 'a science of ghosts, a science of what returns' (Shaw 2018: 2). Hauntology emphasizes absences in the present, as well as acknowledging the ontological dimension of spectrality. As Shaw puts it, 'the spectre facilitates an encounter with the past, in the hope that it will shape our understanding of the present, and of the future' (Shaw 2018: 8). If this is to happen, it becomes the responsibility of the haunted subject to 'speak to the spectre'. As Derrida insists, it is our responsibility to welcome the spectre, to offer hospitality. Following Derrida, Shaw argues that 'hauntology encourages a reading of the post-millennial as a profoundly haunted period, one that seeks to defamiliarize our most recent past and demands that we re-evaluate its relevance in the present, and for the future.' (Shaw 2018: 19) Sanchez creates a specifically Gibraltarian hauntology: Jonathan

Gallardo is haunted by the victims of colonial violence. While the violent deeds are not always committed directly by colonial oppressors, colonialism provides the context, the climate and the opportunities for the atrocities that echo in Jonathan's ears. Unable to cope or to take action, he is ultimately overwhelmed by the tragic visions that crowd in upon him. In a plot twist that invokes poetic justice, the fascist couple who had tortured and almost killed Jonathan drown on their way to Ceuta, the Spanish enclave in Northern Africa – a curious inversion of what is actually happening in the ongoing refugee crisis. In light of recent political developments, the Nazis appear convincing as revenants of fascism, coming back to haunt a world that had mistakenly believed this particular threat to be a thing of the past. The future looks bleak in *Jonathan Gallardo*, seeing that the only two men who have an inkling of tragic future occurrences, Jonathan and his uncle Alfredo, are two alcoholics sitting on a bench in a Beckettian setting, behind the ramparts of Gibraltar's Line Wall Road. Positioned thus, they actually come to haunt a Gibraltar in denial about its residual colonialism. Meanwhile John Seracino in *Solitude House* tries to barricade himself in his remote house, insulated by privilege, and exulting in the fact that Solitude House was the last available colonial bungalow in Gibraltar:

From time to time, too, some reminder of this far-off colonial past would suddenly and almost magically materialise in front of me. For example, one day I found an old bronze penny lodged in a crack between some half-rotted floorboards. With the aid of my car keys, I prised it from its hiding place and held it admiringly on my palm, a grimy, moss-covered little token with King Edward VII's balding profile on one side and the proud, trident-holding Britannia on the other. (Sanchez 2015b: 139)

While such incidents warm his colonialist's heart, at other times he registers a sadness, a haunting atmosphere and a heightened sense of mortality. Finally, zombies do actually emerge from the underworld. Ghosts from Seracino's own past, they recall refugees crawling out of the water, doing so, of all places, through

the shrine of Our Lady of Europa near Europa point, as if to say that Gibraltar epitomizes Europe in so many ways, and that if we are not careful, it is here, in an unacknowledged part of British Europe, that the whole idea of Europe could come to grief. In his politically inflected philosophical ruminations, Derrida equates the 'ramparts of Elsinore' with the 'old Europe' (Derrida 2006: 391). In Sanchez's novels, Gibraltar comes to stand for this 'old Europe'; haunted like the ramparts of Elsinore, it is filled with protagonists who fail the spectre in different ways. Gibraltarian hauntologies suggest that the utopian concept of a united Europe may founder due to internal divisions, historical fault-lines and initiatives such as Brexit as well as re-emerging right-wing violence, and that Europe may be taken to task for not living up to its humanitarian, economic and ecological responsibilities. At this point, the Gibraltarian spectres of colonialism encounter the spectre of Marx, asking insistent questions about capitalist exploitation in a semi-post-colonial world. Through their refusal to welcome the spectre, Sanchez's Gibraltarian protagonists ultimately turn into spectres themselves – spectres of colonial victims and perpetrators.

And finally, depicted in Sanchez's recent fictions as profoundly haunted by residual, unacknowledged colonialism, Gibraltar itself turns spectre, a revenant from Britain's colonial past. Anatomising the Gibraltarian predicament, Sanchez insists that we ignore the past at our peril. Unacknowledged by Britain, 'the Rock' becomes a stumbling block on the way to Brexit. Most uncomfortably, Gibraltarian hauntologies also highlight the fact that colonial-style exploitation remains a reality on the global scale: if we shut ourselves in, like John Seracino in his stylish colonial bungalow Solitude House, and if we shut ourselves off emotionally, like Jonathan Gallardo, those others will come to haunt us, in the shape of the revenants of Nazi thugs and the ghosts of the repressed colonial past calling from their unquiet graves, while the current victims of global carbon capitalism (Di Muzio 2015) are knocking on the gates of Fortress Europe.

### **Competing Interests**

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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